

# Minnesota Veteran



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## In this Issue

- Twins Winter Caravan Stops in Luverne
- From the Desk of the Commissioner
- New Law Change Increases Insurance Coverage for Veterans
- Subscribe to Minnesota Military Radio Podcasts
- Vacancy Announcement - DAV
- Senator Daley Visits Veterans Homes
- Donor Connection Program
- Veterans Wilderness Trips
- Veterans Day on the Hill
- Upcoming Events

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## We Want to Hear From You!

If you have story ideas, events, to nominate a Veteran in the Spotlight or just have information for MDVA's *Minnesota Veteran* newsletter, contact Beth Kocian at [Beth.Kocian@state.mn.us](mailto:Beth.Kocian@state.mn.us) or (651) 757-1550.

## Twins Winter Caravan Stops in Luverne



The Minnesota Twins Winter Caravan made a stop at the Minnesota Veterans Home - Luverne for a private visit with Residents and staff.

The Caravan consisted of Twins infielders Chris Parmelee and Trevor Plouffe, Twins pitcher Anthony Swarzak, former player and current Twins announcer Dan Gladden, Twins mascot TC Bear and representatives from the Twins front office.



Members of the Twins Winter Caravan talked about the upcoming season and answered questions about the team and Target Field. They signed autographs and posed for pictures with Residents and staff. Residents at the Luverne Veterans Home are big Twins fans and enjoy watching games throughout the season.



A big thanks to the Twins Caravan for making a stop at the Luverne Home and remembering our Veterans!

"The Luverne Veterans Home Residents are great Twins fans and never miss watching a game! It was fun to have the Caravan stop at our Home," said Shirley Connor, recreation director at the Luverne Veterans Home.



*From the top: Resident Gordy Erkel and TC Bear. Resident Ralph Lais poses for a picture with Dan Gladden and TC Bear. Minnesota Twin Trevor Plouffe and Resident Floyd Johnson. Resident Brian Peterson and TC Bear. Photos by the recreation department at the Luverne Veterans Home.*

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# From the Desk of the Commissioner



*Commissioner Larry Shellito*

## The Hats!

If you were to ask most elected officials, whether it be community, county, state or federal, who are the ‘Hats’ I bet they would all say ‘it’s the Veterans!’ When there have been issues impacting Veterans, the Veteran Service Organizations (VSO’s) have been able to rally members to show-up at the hearings – with their hats on – to show that the Veterans are watching. I am asking that all Veterans don their hats – at least figuratively – to let our elected leaders know we do care about our fellow Veterans who are in need.

I would also like to take this even further and here is why: The headlines have covered the Department of Defense’s (DOD) projected reduction in force (RIF). All across the full spectrum of the DOD we will be seeing key cuts in personnel through downsizing. This move is easy to predict as it always happened after our nation’s wars.

Fortunately, for now at least, the Department of Veterans Affairs has not been cut; in fact we have been given a 3.6 percent increase. Sounds good – right? But let’s look at the ‘fiscal tails’ of OEF/OIF. The projected disability payments to our newest Veterans could range from \$355 billion to \$534 billion over the next 40 years. Another key aspect of OEF/OIF has been the military’s responsive treatment of our wounded. There were far fewer of our service members who ‘died of wounds.’ Sources estimate 10,000 new claims and patients are enrolling in VA health care each month. The VA Medical System is projected to need an estimated \$201 billion to \$348 billion for the treatment of these great OEF/OIF Veterans’ wounds

Those of us who have been through a RIF know that all levels of government will be looking for cost savings. As Veterans, we must be prepared to stand guard to insure that governmental ‘cost savings’ strategies are not at the expense of our Veterans. So please make it a point to let your governmental leaders know that you are a Veteran and value those in key positions who support them.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry W. Shellito". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

*Larry W. Shellito, Commissioner  
Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs*

## New Law Change Increases Insurance Coverage for Veterans

Some Veterans covered under the Veterans Group Life Insurance program (VGLI) now have the opportunity to increase their coverage to the current maximum coverage under the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) program.

"Currently, 70 percent of the Veterans covered under VGLI are under age 60, have less than \$400,000 of coverage, and will greatly benefit from this law change," said Allison A. Hickey, Department of Veterans Affairs under secretary for benefits.

Under the Veterans' Benefits Act of 2010, enacted on Oct. 13, 2010, Veterans can increase their coverage by \$25,000 at each five-year anniversary date of their policy to the current legislated maximum SGLI coverage, presently, \$400,000.

To date, approximately 21 percent of eligible Veterans have taken advantage of this opportunity, resulting in nearly \$113

million of new coverage being issued.

The VGLI program allows newly discharged Veterans to convert their SGLI coverage they had while in the service to a civilian program. Before enactment of this law, Veterans could not have more VGLI than the amount of SGLI they had at the time of separation from service.

For example, those who got out of the service prior to Sept. 1, 2005, when the maximum SGLI coverage was \$250,000, were limited to \$250,000 in VGLI coverage.

Now on their first five-year anniversary, these Veterans can elect to increase their coverage to \$275,000. On their next five-year anniversary, they can increase the coverage to \$300,000, and so forth.

The additional coverage can be issued regardless of the Vet-

eran's health. To be eligible to purchase this additional coverage, the Veteran must:

- Have active VGLI coverage
- Have less than the current legislated maximum coverage of \$400,000
- Request the additional coverage during the 120 day period prior to each five-year anniversary date, and
- Be less than 60 years of age on the five-year anniversary date of his or her coverage.

Eligible Veterans are notified of this opportunity a week before the start of the 120 day period prior to their anniversary date, and twice more before the actual anniversary date.

For more information about VA's Insurance Program or other VA benefits, go to [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) or call 1-800-827-1000. Veterans are also encouraged to visit VA's web portal eBenefits - Insurance.

## Subscribe to Minnesota Military Radio Hour

If you miss the program Sundays at 7 a.m. - here's a new and easy way to listen to the Minnesota Military Radio on your schedule. The following link will take you directly to the email subscription page - sign up and start receiving the weekly podcasts in your email inbox.

<http://MinnesotaMilitaryRadioHour.com/subscribe/email/>. Subscriptions to show podcasts are also available through iTunes, Google and Yahoo by visiting <http://minnesotamilitaryradiohour.com/>.



## Vacancy Announcement

The Disabled American Veterans (DAV) of MN is seeking qualified individuals to serve as the Department Adjutant due to the resignation of the incumbent. Individuals must be an honorably discharged Veteran and eligible for membership in the DAV.

The DAV MN Department Adjutant is responsible for all aspects of the DAV Department of Minnesota's day-to-day activities. This includes developing and maintaining strong relationships with Minnesota's Veterans community, including other service organizations; federal, state and local Veterans advocates; federal and state legislators and their staff; and any other organization such as MACV or V4V that provides benefits or services to Veterans. The Adjutant is responsible for all DAV activity oversight, including liaison with



DAV Chapters; other state DAV Departments; and National DAV staff.

The Adjutant will act as the Chief Operating Officer of the Department responsible for committee support; conference and convention planning; budget; resource allocation; human resources; contract management; communications; legislative support; oversight of the Department's Enterprise activities; oversight of the Department's transportation network; oversight of the Department's outreach activities; and oversight of the Department's foundation.

To request a copy of the job description email [admin@davmn.org](mailto:admin@davmn.org).

## Senator Ted Daley Visits Veterans Homes

*Senator Ted Daley traveled to three of Minnesota's five Veterans Homes in January. He visited the facilities in Laverne, Fergus Falls and Silver Bay. The following was taken from the Office of Senator Ted Daley in his Weekly Legislative Update on Jan. 6.*

“Minnesota's Veterans Homes mission is dedicated to serving Veterans and their families and to CARE: Creatively deliver focused care; Acknowledge military heritage; Reconnect Residents with the community; Enhance life's experiences. They are recognized as leaders in skilled nursing care delivery and provide Residents with as much independence and choice as possible. The quality of care is foremost; their staff works together to provide Residents with programs individually designed to meet their physical, psychosocial and spiritual needs. Community groups from schools, churches and local businesses are also an integral part in the care programming for these Veterans. At a time when our military men and women need us more than ever, these state of the art facilities provide a quality environment for our deserving Veterans.”

To request alternative formats of this information, please contact MDVA at (612) 548-5961 or [mdva.affirmativeaction@state.mn.us](mailto:mdva.affirmativeaction@state.mn.us) or through the Minnesota Relay Service at 1 (800)

## DAV Foundation of Minnesota Donor Connection Program

The DAV Foundation of Minnesota has implemented the Donor Connection Program for the primary purpose of connecting Veterans in need of used durable medical equipment with medical equipment donors. The Program, staffed by the Minnesota DAV Department, is pro-actively managed utilizing a Minnesota statewide email network; CVSOs, VSOs, Veterans Homes, etc.



*A donated power lift for the back of a minivan.*

On a weekly basis (more often if needed), the availability of donated medical equipment as well as the needs of Veterans is broadcast to the network. Examples of medical equipment donated and connected

to Veterans include; manual and power electric wheelchairs, electric hospital beds, electric lift recliner chairs, electric scooters, walkers, shower chairs, and power lifts.

In 2010 the MN DAV Donor Connection program resulted in equipment with a value of over \$400,000 being transferred from donors to disabled Veterans and/or their families.

If you know of a donor of used durable medical equipment or a Veteran in need of medical equipment, please contact

Gerry Falkowski, DAV of MN Donor Connection Program at 651-210-1161 or by email [g.falkowski@charter.net](mailto:g.falkowski@charter.net).

## Veterans Wilderness Training Trips

Wilderness Inquiry has exciting news about wilderness training trips for Veterans and those currently serving in the active duty, Guard, or Reserves. In partnership with the Sierra Club's Military Families Outdoors program, Wilderness Inquiry will provide greatly discounted outdoor adventure training trips for Veterans during 2012. The retail fee for these trips ranges from \$795-895, but thanks to a grant from the Sierra Club, the cost to Veterans is only \$100.

All of the trips are designed to build on Veterans' leadership experience and promote lifelong outdoor recreation skills. Veterans will spend 6-7 days alongside fellow Veterans camping, paddling, hiking, and exploring the wild outdoors with experienced professionals who will train them to lead their own adventure trips. Veterans and those currently serving can register now for:

- March 5-10, 2012 - Florida Everglades 10,000 Islands 6-Day
- June 10-16, 2012 - Boundary Waters Canoe Area 7-Day
- July 27- Aug 1, 2012 - Yellowstone Lake Backcountry Canoe 6-Day
- Aug 27 - Sep 2, 2012 - Boundary Waters Canoe Area 7-Day

Learn more and reserve your spot at [www.wildernessinquiry.org/veterans](http://www.wildernessinquiry.org/veterans).

## Hennepin County U.S. Army Veteran Experiences Elk Hunt

*Minnesota Elk Breeders Association (MnEBA), December 29, 2011*

Mike McElhiney, a wounded 21 year Veteran of the United States Army, recently undertook a hunt most people only dream of as the recipient of the 5th Annual MnEBA Charitable Elk Hunt. The hunt took place Dec. 2-4, and was coordinated by MnEBA. It was sponsored through the generosity of Prairie Hills Elk, Tony's Trophy Elk Hunt Ranch, Lake Superior Chapter Safari Club International (SCI), Midwest Outdoors Unlimited and Oak Point Elk Farm.

Mike McElhiney is a retired Master Sergeant who began his military career in the Army Infantry just after graduating from high school in 1989. He rapidly rose in military ranks and eventually became the Battalion Assistant Operations Sergeant and Senior Weapons Sergeant for Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) 574. Mike's ODA made history after the attacks on 9-11 as the first team to infiltrate southern Afghanistan, bringing with them the current president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai. Together, they led the insurgency into the provinces of Southern Afghanistan at the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). On the morning of Dec. 5, 2001, Mike and all of his team members were either killed in action or nearly fatally wounded in a battle north of Kandahar. Mike ultimately lost his right arm as a result of this attack.

Even though Mike is retired from active duty, he still continues to actively support Veterans through the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs where he serves as the Legislative Director. Mike loves to hunt and fish and has been hunting since he could "keep up." Mike says, "I remember my first hunt with my dad. It was small game –rabbits, squirrels and quail. As I recall, I was able to carry my BB gun along. I hunt whatever I have time to hunt now, as well as what I can afford."

The elk hunt awarded to Mike was something he never thought he'd have the chance to do. "I appreciate it. It's the trophy of a lifetime, there's no doubt about it."

Tony Beckel of Tony's Trophy Elk Hunt Ranch as well as Ron Welle and cameraman LeRoy Weiner of Midwest Outdoors Unlimited accompanied Mike on his hunt.



*Master Sergeant (retired) and MDVA Legislative Director Mike McElhiney with his beautiful trophy elk!*

"I've shot guns a long time, but the first time you encounter one of these things it's a whole different story,"

Mike is thankful to everyone who had a part in granting him the "hunt of a lifetime." Ron Welle expressed appreciation to Mike for his service to our country with these words, "This is just a little bit of us, we call giving back to our Veterans for what they have given us. I can't thank [Mike] enough."

"These are the reasons we do it, freedoms we cherish, the reason we go overseas. We're out here living the dream...just being out here having fun, driving around seeing the scenery, cooking over the campfire, that's what it's all about. We're in no rush, no hurry, and under no threats so I love it," said Mike.



THE VOICE OF 381,000 MINNESOTA VETERANS

# MINNESOTA COMMANDERS' TASK FORCE



## 2012 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

The Annual Veterans Day on the Hill event jointly sponsored by the Commanders' Task Force (CTF), the United Veterans Legislative Council (UVLC) and the Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers (MACVSO) will take place on Wednesday, Feb. 15. For more information visit <http://www.mnctf.org/>.



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5K RUN/WALK

**2012**

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MAY 19, 2012

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For sponsorship information or to donate to our silent auction, please call: (651)291.1212 or email: [martin@davmn.org](mailto:martin@davmn.org)

All proceeds go to continue the mission of the DAV of Minnesota Foundation  
[www.davmn.org/foundation](http://www.davmn.org/foundation)



## Upcoming Events

### Holes For Heroes Ice Fishing Tournament - Feb. 4



The 2012 Holes for Heroes Ice Fishing Tournament will take place Saturday, Feb. 4 from 12 -3 p.m. at Medicine Lake in Plymouth. To register for the tournament visit <http://2012holesforheroes.eventbrite.com>.

### Veterans Day on the Hill - Feb. 15

The Minnesota Commanders' Task Force, together with the United Veterans Legislative Council and the Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers will be holding a joint Veterans Day on the Hill event in the Capitol Rotunda to advocate for their 2012 legislative agenda. The rally begins at 9 a.m. in the Capitol Rotunda with the posting of the colors and invocation. Governor Dayton will deliver the keynote address. Additional remarks will be given by the CTF Chair, the UVLC Chair and the MACVSO President. Veterans are encouraged to meet with their legislators, by appointment, at the conclusion of the rally.



### Veteran Appreciation Events - Feb. 15-17



The St. Cloud VA Health Care System invites central Minnesota Veterans and members of the public to attend the Veteran Appreciation events scheduled at the St. Cloud VA's Community Based Outpatient Clinics, Feb. 15-17, during the National Salute to Veteran Patients. Veteran Appreciation events are scheduled for the Montevideo CBOC Feb. 15, the Max J. Beilke CBOC in Alexandria Feb. 16, and the Brainerd CBOC Feb. 17. The events run from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at each location.

### African-Americans in Aviation: Then and Now - Feb. 29

The event will be at the Minnesota History Center, 3M Auditorium from 1 - 2:30 p.m. The invited panel includes Maj. Joe Gomer, Tuskegee Airman, Woodson M. Fountain, Northwest Airlines' first African-American pilot, and Mamie Langford Singleton, Youth Initiative Aviation Academy Executive Director. Join the invited panel as they share personal aviation stories of triumph and defeat from an African-American perspective.

### Servicewomen's Luncheon - Mar. 31

The luncheon will be held at Gallagher Hansen VFW Post #295 from 12 - 3 p.m. For additional information contact Marilyn Rothecker at 651-451-6007 or [marilyn839@mns.com](mailto:marilyn839@mns.com). Registration deadline is March 15. <http://tinyurl.com/88ay4kh>.

For a complete listing of events across the state of Minnesota, visit <http://calendar.mdva.state.mn.us>.